

Theater: Tangerine Family Circus - 3286 - Gay Lesbian Bi Trans News

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Theater: Tangerine Family Circus 2005-09-14

Playwright: Kim Crutcher, Andrew HunzekerHesed, Felicity HunzekerHesed

At: The Actors Gymnasium at Noyes Cultural Arts Center, Evanston

Phone: (773) 784-6872; \$15

Runs through: Sept. 25

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

The Actors Gymnasium isn't your usual hoops-nets-and-hardwood-floors recreation facility. Except for a small audience area, the ground is covered wall-to-wall with padded matting, and the ceiling, festooned with acrobatic apparatus—augmented, on this occasion, by swags of brocade in Arabian-Nights hues and a pair of stageside musicians playing gypsy czardas. And as we wait in our seats for the show to begin, tights-and-spangle-clad gamines, under guise of taking a survey, covertly distribute notes informing us that their ring-masters are forcing them to perform under 'horrible duress'.

Thus are we apprised of the premise for Tangerine Family Circus, a spectacle showcasing the clowns and acrobats in the ActGym's advanced training classes. Authors Kim Crutcher, Andrew HunzekerHesed and Felicity HunzekerHesed propose a circus composed of orphan children enslaved by the evil Maximillian and Esmeralda Tangerine—vampires, not in the old-fashioned bloodsucking sense, but controlling 'parents' demanding unquestioning loyalty of their charges, a psychological tyranny buttressed by severe punishment meted out at any sign of misdirected affection.

This subtext transforms Jill Heyser and Sarah Markwood's double-lyra act, which requires its two sisters to entwine in quasi-amorous poses atop a hoop suspended in the air, into a duet of

forbidden love. Mandi Michalski's triumphant spin on the Spanish Web, however, emerges as a call to arms, initiating a rebellion (in which WE take part) against their oppressors.

It's all G-rated, of course—the littlest Tangerines, Brendan Russell and Alessandra Stevens, wouldn't be in the show if it weren't—but director Crutcher coaxes emotional expressions from the players that impose multidimensional metaphors on the familiar big-top repertoire. And while the text could do with some tightening to reduce the transitions that stretch its running time to 90 minutes, the dazzling skills and exuberant sparkle of the company, led by the HunzekerHeseds as the tango-dancing Mr. and Mrs. Tangerine, keep the amplified stage picture always fluid and animated.
